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# The Cinematic Defeat of Brecht by Artaud in Peter Brook's Marat/Sade

## **Cover Page Footnote**

This article came about as a marriage of two graduate seminars - Susan Cocalis' "20th Century German Drama" and Barton Byg's "Brecht and World Cinema" - to which (and to whom) I owe a great theoretical debt. I would also like to acknowledge the encouraging words of Fatima Naqvi when I presented this paper at the 2007 "Violence: A Necessary Evil?" conference at Rutgers University.

## The Cinematic Defeat of Brecht by Artaud in Peter Brook's Marat/Sade

*"Ideas don't come without limbs, and so these are no longer ideas but limbs,  
limbs fighting among themselves."*

-Antonin Artaud

On the silver screen and on the stage, the mid-1960s constituted a vibrant and polemical time period from which the present is still reeling. While Jean-Luc Godard, Alexander Kluge, Jean-Marie Straub and Glauber Rocha were breaking down genre conventions and studio standards in film, director Peter Brook and playwright Peter Weiss reinterpreted the entire apparatus of the theater and put its straw-person narratives into perspective. The "new" theater and cinema intended to either directly provoke the comfortable *bourgeois* audience, as in Peter Handke's infamous anti-play *Publikumsbeschimpfung* (1966), or at least give them more of the tools necessary to understand and combat the world's injustices, as in Peter Palitzsch's GDR production of Bertolt Brecht's *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* (1961). Brecht was in fact one of many left-leaning theater philosophers, whose names were bandied about during this time period, almost superseding Constantine Stanislavski's in theoretical importance. In the meantime, filmmakers like Godard, et al. used Brecht's theories of *epic theater* to justify a self-reflexive approach to the cinema that forced the audience to consider the spectator passivity encouraged by the medium itself. Running parallel with discussions about Brecht's aesthetic vision and epic theater in general was the discourse about what to do with Antonin Artaud, the nihilistic poster-boy for the "theater of cruelty" of the '30s and '40s. Artaud, as an artist, embodied a human-pessimist view of the theater, confronting the horrific "truth" of the world's callousness by staging elaborate, violent spectacles for the sake of shocking the audience out of their passivity. Similarly, in the film world,

Sidney Lumet, Sam Peckinpah, and Arthur Penn were experimenting in the 60s with the depiction of realistic graphic violence in cinema to confront jaded cinema-going audiences with the unpleasantness of their own violent fantasies.

It is amidst this swirling discussion of aesthetics in both film and theater that Brook made a film of Weiss' play *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung Jean-Paul Marats dargestellt durch die Schauspielgruppe des Hospizes zu Charenton unter Anleitung des Herrn de Sade*.<sup>1</sup> (1964/5) The original play by Weiss is a brutal, stylized two-act drama framing a Marquis de Sade play about the persecution and murder of Jean-Paul Marat, an historical event that conventionally prefigures the downfall of the French Revolution. The work is acted out by the insane inhabitants and political prisoners of the asylum where Sade spent his last days. Featuring actors playing mental patients and political prisoners who are playing at actors, *Marat/Sade* addresses both the ideology of performance and the performance of ideology with regards to government, justice, violence, aesthetics, sex and the grotesque. Weiss intended the dialogue between Sade and Marat, which has been "written" by Sade, to delineate the opposing political, aesthetic and philosophical arguments of Artaud and Brecht respectively. He pitted the theater of the mind against that of the body, Brechtian idealism against Artaudian nihilism, fighting for a cause against causeless-ness. Moreover, Weiss incorporates Brechtian alienation effects, as well as Artaudian shock tactics, into his script, matching form to content in a skillful dialectic of aesthetics. Brook, a theatrical director and theorist from the United Kingdom, stood out as one of those contemporary *auteurs* in the 1960s ready to tackle a work like Weiss', aiming to tear down the foundations of the theatrical tradition by confronting the audience with their own status as voyeurs. By

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter referred to as *Marat/Sade*.

most measures, Brook's lively stage interpretation of *Marat/Sade* with the Royal Shakespeare Company became the version of Weiss' play that launched it into considerable international prominence. He gives Weiss due credit for the production's distinctly unsettling quality that affected theater-going audiences throughout Europe, saying that "one sees in the play's action the uncomfortable, irritating ambiguity Peter Weiss felt because he was writing an unresolved play, which to me was its virtue and its force."<sup>2</sup>

Yet Brook's filmed version of his stage production transgresses against Weiss' play-without-a-resolution by unintentionally giving it a resolution, the freestanding thesis and antithesis is given a synthesis. The French and German New Wave film movements of the mid-1960s were internationally recognized by the time Brooks' was shooting his production in 1966, but those movements' messages about exposing the artifice and industry of film production and cultural products apparently did not come across to Brook as a filmmaker. Brook undermines the Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekte* imbedded in Weiss' play, which could have been the centerpiece of the drama's transition into the film world, by cinematically immersing the viewer in the theatrical action, unnecessarily conferring a kind of omniscience onto him/her. Artaud and Weiss' *Sade* would have no philosophical issue with such a voyeuristic liberty, but Brecht and Weiss' *Marat* would find it antithetical to their purpose of making conscious the boundaries and artifice of the audience's lives. So whereas Weiss' play might very well be a perfect dialectic or even come out slightly in favor of *Marat*, Brook's film betrays a bias for *Sade* in its primary elements of filmic expression - montage, *mise-en-scène* and cinematography - in addition to its version of the script. The dialectic between *Sade* and *Marat*'s worldviews is clearly

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<sup>2</sup> "Marat/Sade Forum." pg. 216.

attempted in Brook's production, but in the end he has at least implied a victor with the camera and editing. This leads one to question, given the mixture of aesthetic models within the play, the possibility or desirability of a dialectic portrayal of the written play in film.

### **Brecht v. Artaud v. Cinema**

Weiss had no intention of depicting psychologically realistic characters when he wrote the dialogue for Jean-Paul Marat and his author the Marquis de Sade, but rather he created mouthpieces of two diametrically opposed ideologies. Max Spalter writes:

Weiss himself has referred to his leading characters as rhetorical constructions, and the description is apt: Marat and Sade, the verbal antagonists of this play, exist only to define the contours of an argument, and all action accompanying this action constitutes a body of footnotes germane to the ideological substance of that argument.<sup>3</sup>

Assuming then that Sade incarnates the ideology of the voyeuristic sado-masochist Artaud and Marat that of the dramatic polemicist Brecht, one wonders what elements of their philosophies that Weiss addresses and Brook subverts and/or exaggerates. A brief summary of their two *Weltanschauungen* in relation to general trends and specific aesthetic elements in the theater is presented below, complete with examples from Weiss' text. The collision of contrasting stylistic elements within the script itself, even in the 1965 revised version, highlights Weiss' dialectic and puts Brook's film into a clearer analytical perspective.

"If empathy makes something ordinary of a special event, *Verfremdung* makes something special out of an ordinary one." Brecht wrote as the Philosopher in his unfinished *Lehrstück, The Messingkauf Dialogues*. "The audience is no longer taking

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<sup>3</sup> Spalter. pg. 227.

refuge from the present day in history; the present day becomes history."<sup>4</sup> Making the everyday seem unfamiliar, capable of being analyzed for its relationships and ultimately revealing more about the society outside of the play than within the play itself constitutes Brecht's approach. Brecht's purposes in doing so were not only to entertain an audience, an act to which he was not necessarily opposed, but also to sharpen a viewer's perception about unjust societal realities. Labeling most theater as "distraction," Brecht sought to break the constant, cyclical indoctrination of children and adults alike in the illusionism of the Church, consumer goods and political propaganda from the Right. Weiss' Marat, in his critique of the nobility and the Church, represents this viewpoint in particular when he says: "*Und die Kinder wiederholten die Lehren und glaubten daran/ wie man daran glaubt/ was man wieder und wieder hört.*"<sup>5</sup> Marat would prefer that these children die for the sake of constructing a new truth, rather than forever living and accepting a field of lies put forth by the ruling powers. Marat's aspirations to activate the people's critical intellect so that they might comprehend the injustices perpetrated upon them and revolt is analogous to Brecht's notion of reinventing the theater so that it can neither lull the audience into a self-satisfied slumber of the intellect nor repeat the same old paternalistic truisms found in conventional performances.

To achieve the end of alienating the audience, Brecht prescribes, in his *A Short Organum for the Theater*, that one creates a historical/theatrical space with its "distinguishing marks, [keeping] their impermanence always before our eyes, so that our own period can be seen to be impermanent too."<sup>6</sup> This can be achieved, and is achieved in Weiss' *Marat/Sade*, with the employment of theatrical techniques prescribed by Weiss.

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<sup>4</sup> Brecht. *Messingkauf Dialogues*. pg. 76.

<sup>5</sup> Weiss. pg. 181.

<sup>6</sup> Brecht. *A Short Organum for the Theater*. pg. 36.

In acting, one uses the *social gestus* to distanciate the actor from the role they are playing from that role's position in society. Such an acting style forces the actor to perform actions recognizable for their "situatedness" in society, not for their representation of a character's psychological reality. The usual examples of such a gesture within Brecht's own *oeuvre* are Helene Weigel's taking/biting of coins she receives as Mother Courage in *Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder* or the unknown worker at the beginning of *Kuhle Wampe* (1932) removing his watch before he commits suicide. But Weiss and Brook certainly incorporate it into their versions of *Marat/Sade* as well. After all, the play revolves around the absurdist, artificial animation of the interned deviants through their acting roles. Corday's stylized three-time attempt at murdering Marat, which Sade redirects the first two times with the statement "*Noch nicht Corday*," presents us with a murder that is clearly just a function of history as opposed to a situation which will place the audience in suspense. Any pretense of courtly behavior that the actor playing the sex fiend playing Duperret has to be mediated by his unbridled lust that occasionally breaks loose, and which Brook's film splendidly depicts. Sade being whipped by Corday as the onlookers watch is one interesting example, because his very act of participating in such a scene situates him as part of the sex criminal element of Charenton and not as a character to be eroticized. Coulmier, on the other hand, performs a similar *social gestus* in Brook's film each time he rises up from his seat to censor the production, interacting with the play only in a sense of an outside censor and not as an actual character.

Other aesthetic aspects of Brecht within *Marat/Sade* can be found in its production design. In Brechtian theater, the "knots" of a production should be visible; that is, the audience should in some way or another be reminded periodically that they are



watching a play which has been artificially constructed for a distinct purpose. Such a conscious disregard for psychological realism is achieved by Weiss in the very architecture of the play: the characters enter the stage space at the beginning and nobody leaves, enters, has to relieve him/herself, etc. until the very end. One is confined in one's imagination and fantasies by the inability to have an off-stage space. And despite the appalling nature of what transpires in Sade's play, Coulmier, his wife and their daughter sit until the play is finished, more representing on-stage what the audience theoretically does off-stage than the "reality" of these three characters. The sense of limitation and enclosure put upon by Weiss' enclosed stage boundaries is heightened in Brook's stage production by the addition of prison bars between the audience and the actors, but he then eliminates that barrier in his film version by penetrating it with his own cinematography. In addition, Brook's film of *Marat/Sade* contains a whole wall that gives off nothing but a pale fluorescent glow, a feature not generally built into asylums in 1808, to eerily light the set and make another production "knot" known to the audience. Combined with the stilted dialogue, the lack of suspense (i.e., one knows very well that Corday is going to kill Marat, and it occurs), and singers who deliver Sade's musical commentary on the fate of Marat to the audience, the closed set of the asylum accentuates the multitude of ideas present within the script without lulling the audience into passivity with a monoperspective narrative and the illusion of a whole alternative theatrical world. Ultimately, Brechtian theater rendered by Weiss is certainly the theater of the *word*; the bizarre images of the social deviants putting on a play being sublimated by the content of the dialectic that they pose and the societal relationships affected by this argument.

Yet Weiss and Brook also integrate elements of Artaud's so-called "theater of cruelty," dramas of surreal and violent spectacle, into their versions of *Marat/Sade*, though on the surface Artaud's aesthetic appears antithetical to Brecht's. Artaud's theatrical argument is premised on the inherent insincerity of Aristotelian theatrical performance, the fact that a problem stated at the beginning of the play has to be resolved at the end, and that only certain, moderate measures might be taken by the inhibited characters to solve the problem. The theatrical solution in his theory and practice was to push the envelope of human sensitivity so that one would be shocked and repulsed by the content unfolding on-stage and confronted with an irresolvable conundrum at the end. In other words, Artaud wanted to physically merge the spectator's experience with the work itself, to push cultural norms of tolerance until they simply snapped under the pressure. The performance suddenly becomes painfully real to the voyeur audience, where individuals must choose whether or not they turn away from the spectacle unfolding on-stage, and the narrative becomes divided into distinct mental units: prior to a shocking act and after a shocking act.

Artaud's is more specifically the theater of the *visual*, a world of pantomime and gestural language that emphasizes what words cannot possibly describe. And in Weiss' asylum environment, particularly in the deeds of the actors playing patients playing supporting members of the cast, an ample playground for macabre, lewd, twisted and absurd bodily actions is provided. Weiss describes precisely the necessary costumes and psychological disorders of the various characters at the very beginning of his work, and then proceeds to give highly prescriptive stage directions throughout. Each inmate mimes his/her own execution by guillotine during the scene *Triumph des Todes*, and the

brutal beatings that are rained down upon them for getting out of control at any point only emphasize their complete lack of physical freedom. Whereas the stage in the Brechtian sense represents a controlled realm of the mind, Weiss' set-up is certainly a physical prison for the bodies contained within as well. The oral descriptions of the horrors of the French Revolution from Corday and others are not just aimed at one's intellect, but at one's sense of humanity as well. Artaud would even follow the Wagnerian concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* so long as that work caused the audience to feel something visceral and sincere. Brook's version of Weiss' grand finale, as rendered in stage and film with an orgy of rape, raving, and rampage, could be construed as the culmination of this aspect of the aesthetic.

But perhaps the most Artaudian element is embodied by Sade himself, a director who acts as a main character in his own play. He straddles the world of the 1793 murder of Marat, Charenton in 1808, and the present, as his is the play that the audience must ultimately experience. His authorial presence is felt by Marat, who exists in one diegesis, Coulmier, who exists in another, and by the audience, to whom Sade seems painfully sane in a pool of madmen. Weiss thus has Sade as a character who exists in the ideal Artaudian aesthetic state; all barriers are removed between him, his work and his own reactions to his work. He can step in and participate in the dialogue when he has scripted himself to do so, and otherwise he remains the privileged voyeur, a master of ceremonies whose wide-ranging ambivalence and simultaneous amusement guides the entire action of the play. Sade does not cause repulsion, fascination, shock, and horror himself; his work does that for him, as Artaud's did.

Both aesthetics described and implemented by Brecht and Artaud can be also rendered in cinematic terms, as film scholars such as Stephen Heath and Franco Fortini have been using Brecht to access alienating works done by Godard or Harun Farocki for years, and Artaud has been an icon for alternative surrealist cinema for generations.<sup>7</sup> One sees the clash between socially cognizant works and works of pure wrenching spectacle in particular during the New German Cinema after the *Oberhausen Manifest* was signed in 1962, when some directors like Werner Herzog or Volker Schlöndorff inherited the German expressionist and romantic traditions and infused them with more brutality, while others such as Kluge, Farocki and Rainer Werner Fassbinder used the forms of documentary and/or melodrama to carry on the Brechtian concept of *Verfremdungseffekt* to the cinema. Watch Fassbinder's *Katzelmacher* (1967) opposite Herzog's *Woyzeck* (1979), or Kluge's *Die Patriotin* (1979) opposite Schlöndorff's *Die Blechtrommel* (1979) to get a sense of what kind of artistic dichotomy existed at the time in European cinema.

Just as one arrives at a Brechtian or an Artaudian aesthetic through usage of formal theatrical technique, the cinema has specific tropes that traditionally signify engaging an audience's intellect versus their emotions, sense of humanity, and sense of propriety. Now one can begin to look at Brook's film from a cinematic perspective as opposed to a theatrical one. Starting with the *mise-en-scène*, if the artificial nature of the set and the film environment is visually or aurally established, then the film tends to lead toward Brechtianism. Brook's judicious use of the bars that only go up to a certain height, shots of the audience and the blank wall that bathes the cast in a pale light certainly does expose the artifice of the production. But if the *mise-en-scène* is sterile,

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<sup>7</sup> Fortini. pg. 35.

hostile, grimy and/or overwrought in some fashion, as Brook's asylum set certainly is, then one invokes an Artaudian aesthetic as well.

The acting follows the same formula - social gestures and character abstraction for a Brechtian effect, total and passionate embodiment of characters involved in grotesque/degrading situations for an Artaudian effect - and Brook's production naturally contains considerable examples of both. A particular master of the social gesture in Brook's version is Coulmier, who only intrudes on Sade's play for its political incorrectness and is always introduced by an off-screen pounding of his cane and his vocal objection. One does not believe for a moment that he as an actor is doing anything but signify the figure of Coulmier. On the other hand, Brooks' nightmarish-looking denizens of the asylum, with their heads partially shaven and real drool dripping from their mouths, are so cinematically captivating and believable that a viewer cannot help but engage emotionally with their frantic gestures. When the patient in Scene 15 *Fortsetzung des Gesprächs zwischen Marat und Sade* lurches forward and gives his speech about man being a "crazy animal" ("*Ein irrsinniges Tier/ ein irrsinniges Tier ist der Mensch.*" in Weiss), his gnashing contorted face framed from the side as he crawls along the bench, the effect for the viewer is not intended to be a rational one.<sup>8</sup> A Brechtian portrayal of such a madman would have the actor behave with complete sobriety and then perform one gesture that would codify/signify his place as one whom society would consider insane, such as smacking himself in the face.

A Brechtian aesthetic is often intended with cinematography in which the *tableaux* shot becomes the norm, time passing before the camera is not necessarily filled with action (so that the viewer has time to think), and even the camera itself becomes

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<sup>8</sup> Weiss. pg. 185.

situated within the narrative context as a spectator. The latter means that not only are speeches delivered with frequency to the camera itself, but that the camera cannot cross certain boundaries and become an omniscient spectator on the action. One is then forced to contemplate one's role as a viewer of cinema and the action before the camera as specific reenactment to show societal relationships. An Artaudian camera is one that, like Sade, not only views the action but takes part in the action.<sup>9</sup> In conventional cinematography, smoothly tracked camera movements indicate order within the diegesis, whereas jerky hand-held camera movements indicate raw, unadulterated, chaotic on-the-spot filmmaking that takes part in any violent stage action. During violent sequences in Brook's film, the camera suddenly reverts to the latter form, adding to the viewer's involvement in nausea producing sequences. Focus serves a similar function, with the amateurish quality of elements coming in and out of focus suggesting an in-your-face kind of realism. Brook's occasional racking of focus or foregrounding and backgrounding of characters and elements frequently puts one significant element consciously out of focus in his shots. But this does not so much call attention to the camera (which would be more Brechtian) than it does reveal a contrasting element that will cause more tension in a shot. Finally, framing faces in close-ups, putting the viewer at an intimate distance with regard to the actors, tends toward an Artaudian aesthetic of spectacle as well. After all, the mimicry becomes quite important when the camera spends so much time on the human face, and the surreal intensity of the later violent sequences in Brook's film is increased by our complete familiarity with the characters.

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<sup>9</sup> What I consider to be the absolute example of the Sade/Artaudian perspective in film can be found in the Paul McGuigan film *Gangster No. 1* (2000), where during one scene the camera perspective of the murderer suddenly becomes the camera perspective of the murdered, and the audience must visually experience what it must be like to be violently killed.

Twenty-five anonymous people in an orgy of violence is less emotionally effective than characters with faces running amok after two-and-a-half hours of familiar interaction.

To add a word on montage, the space here is too limited to provide a full discussion of Sergei Eisenstein's various forms of intellectual montage, but it suffices to say the juxtaposition of two shots can be shocking and/or intellectual, depending on the rhythmic, compositional, or contextual elements varying between the two shots and other images prior to it. In general, choppy cuts that remain within the same narrative space tend to bring out an emotional response of confusion and tension, whereas conceptually motivated cuts made at a meditative pace between the narrative and material outside the diegesis or some other means of commentary on the action tend to activate the viewer's intelligence.<sup>10</sup> Suffice it to say, Brook proves to be very much the theater director in that he has thought of montage primarily in the narrative and emotional sense, using the cuts to transition from one *mise-en-scène* composition to another or to make a scene more rhythmically tense or relaxed. Brook as a filmmaker must be given due credit for a solid cinematic creation in *Marat/Sade*, but his interpretation nevertheless comes from the perspective of a director who prizes human actors over sequential imagery that constructs a largely conceptual argument.

### III. Weiss v. Brook

The original version of Weiss' *Marat/Sade* naturally has its own contradictory nature inscribed on itself. In no instance does Weiss allow the audience to process merely an authorial opinion, and his act of ripping Marat and Sade's dialogue from their own texts and speeches removes some portion of his own authorial agency over their

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<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, montage is too complicated a cinematic field to fully discuss under the auspices of this paper. Suffice it to say, this author is still not entirely sure when a certain cut is conceptually motivated as opposed to narratively motivated, and therefore Brechtian.

words.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, once the *Marat/Sade* stagings spread out from the Federal German Republic (FRG, Weiss' country of origin) and began in East Germany in 1965, changes were made to the piece that altered its delicate dialectic toward the aesthetic and political side of Marat. Weiss even implemented the edits on his own script, so that the 1965 edition was made more palatable for a German Democratic Republic (GDR) audience, at least as far as the government censors were concerned. Similarly, Brook's screen production of Geoffrey Skelton's translation of *Marat/Sade* had a Western audience to satisfy, the production being made during a tumultuous time in the Cold War. Marat as a character could not necessarily have been given equal treatment in such an environment, but it is nevertheless worthwhile documenting the differences between the final interpretations of the work. After all, perhaps Brook's conservative aesthetic decisions with the film were also politically motivated.

For the performance at the *Volkstheater* in Rostock, Weiss edited the play to reincorporate an earlier-written epilogue with a rallying speech by Marat delivered after his death, which denounces the "*einzigste Welt, [die vom Geld regiert war]*," a renewed call for arms against the capitalist system.<sup>12</sup> The patients were no longer madmen, but instead became political prisoners like Roux, except for Corday, "*deren Wahnsinn noch akzentuiert wurde*."<sup>13</sup> Marat sang a few of the songs commenting on his own life, the fools and herald are given normal appearances, Coulmier sings the Napoleonic anthem with his family, Roux is attached onto a modern metallic chair, the nuns are doctors'

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<sup>11</sup> In addition to real speeches made by Marat and words written by Sade, Weiss also incorporates specific textual elements from Georg Büchner's *Dantons Tod* as another source for literary-historical prose for the piece.

<sup>12</sup> Weiss. pg. 251.

<sup>13</sup> Taberner-Prat. pg. 103.



assistants and thick programs were handed out at the beginning of the play containing disclaimers and the following statement:

*"Das Stück von Peter Weiss erfasst die gefährlichen restaurativen und regressiven Tendenzen der Westdeutschen Wirklichkeit als Folge der auch 1945 unterbliebenen, d.h. mit Gewalt unterdrückten sozialen Veränderungen. In 'Marat' erscheint die gesellschaftliche und soziale Veränderung als geschichtliche Alternative."*<sup>14</sup>

In such an ideological environment, the modified version of Weiss' play lost many of its theatrically interesting elements *vis-à-vis* Artaud, namely actors playing the mentally ill to the hilt and Marat being the puppet of Sade's argument. The production was even criticized by GDR critics for losing its "mysticism" and for not taking a balanced enough stance on the two viewpoints.

But Weiss as a playwright writing for the theater dealt with overt censorship from a government paranoid about the seduction of capitalist decadence for the average GDR citizen. His aesthetic choices were motivated by adjusting the narrative so that it might be presented in any form, and Brechtian epic theater is not so much the result as GDR propaganda. Brook's production, on the other hand, results in an argument for Artaud, not because Brook had not intended to maintain the balance between the two aesthetics, but that he perhaps did not fully comprehend the *film* medium's relation to Brecht and Artaud. What follows is a specific outline of cinematic choices Brook made that ultimately divert the filmed version of his theatrical work from its fulfilling intellectual and emotional counterplay to voyeuristic gratuity. This is, of course, disregarding the already present narrative differences between Weiss' script, Weiss' revised script, Skelton's translation, Adrian Mitchell's screenplay and Brook's final cut of the film; it should suffice to know that in Brook's film, the Voltaire and teacher scene are not there

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 104.

and Marat's speaking role is cut entirely during his scenes with Simonne in Scene 22 *Armer Marat verfolgt und verschrien*, with Sade in Scene 28 *Armer Marat in deiner Wanne* and with the cast in the Epilogue. Historical context is offered at the beginning of the film via a voice-over telling the main details of the situation, ending in the statement: "This much is fact." A Brechtian reference to the inherent fictionality of Brook's product has already been made, but one sees how far the statement is taken.

Beginning with the *mise-en-scène*, which is notably bleak and simultaneously faithful to the historical period onstage as well as to Weiss' script, one finds the visual space that Brook constructs to be visually arresting. At the beginning, the camera is led into the bathhouse with all the rest of the prisoners, and the viewer is introduced to that space as the prisoners are. The dark bars to one side of the screen are introduced via a straight cut after a prisoner's eyeline points in that direction, and remain mysterious until a cut to a tracking shot that pulls back away from the bars while Coulmier speaks to the camera reveals where the audience supposedly is. The herald, Roux, Sade and Marat in particular make steady use of the privilege to stare directly at the camera, mimicking the Brechtian address to the audience. To Brook's credit, he never changes the lighting to match any shot made within the space, with the spaces that are lit and darkened remaining exactly as they are through the end. In addition, all sound is generated by sources on-screen and on-stage; no non-diegetic music or sound is introduced after the voice-over in the beginning. The actors' costumes almost precisely match those in the script, and their lunatic behaviors stand as Weiss wrote them, but the camera's completely intimate exploration of the actor's faces, resplendant with makeup or bearing psychotic and/or sober expressions, refuses to treat the actors simply as throwaway representatives

of the master argument. The actors' blocking remains brutally faithful to their respective roles, and the singers and the herald are specially set before the camera to stage specific occurrences, announcements, and songs for the viewer, not the audience seen in the film. Though Brook aimed only to document his own stage production and not create a filmic environment separate from that, his shot compositions appear to revolve around displaying his actors' talents and costumes, as opposed to putting them into a spatial context where they can be interpreted socially. The sheer flamboyance of the four singers, the smoke that is added to Marat's nightmare in Scene 26, *Marats Gesichte* and the on-stage beatings with all the screaming and such are enough to emotionally engage the audience past a point of no return. The actors in the grand finale *allgemeine Kopulation* at the end break free of their Sade-imposed role to take on their Artaud-imposed role as lunatics and sex offenders running amok. But the ending derives its power of spectacle not merely from the acts performed before the camera (and implied off the camera), but from the camera itself.

By far, the cinematography of Brook's *Marat/Sade* is the most to blame for his aesthetic delivery of the work to Artaud. The camera enters the movie not as a spectator, but as a prisoner's view being escorted into the room. But then it becomes omniscient a few moments later, granted free movement throughout the stage by way of the cuts. The viewer feels "there," in the caged-off stage, being addressed and occasionally ignored for the sake of that black-barred wall that conceals the audience. A wide-angled lens is used for wide shots, such as when the prisoners sing their first song in Scene 5 *Huldigung Marats*, to enhance the surreal druggy quality of the camera perspective. From the point that Sade is introduced, his hands resting gently on the narcissistically well-bound book

of his own play and a gentle, dramatic camera tilt upward revealing the actor Patrick MacGee's tortured look as he stares into the camera, one knows instinctively who the hero of this piece will be. Marat, by contrast, is ambivalently introduced in a close-up looking off to one side, framed with Simone's hands on his neck.<sup>15</sup> From there on out, the camera frequently peeks over the shoulder of Sade into the fray, resembling his point-of-view as much as possible. The power relationships are then further complicated by the introduction of the audience, silhouetted against the black bars framing the stage, which occurs in a long shot directly after a close-up of a cudgel clutched in a guard's fist while the prisoners chant "Freedom!" and claw at the bars.<sup>16</sup>

The relationship between the point-of-view of the camera and the position of the viewer is also muddled by the montage: one is in the middle of the audience, at the bars, in the faces of the actors as they deliver the lines to the camera, watching the actors voyeuristically as they deliver lines to the audience, and taking actors perspectives when the shot-reverse-shot situation has been set up. In other words, the camera can be everywhere and nowhere at the same time, and gladly goes wherever regardless of what that does to the Brechtian aspect of the aesthetic. If the viewer is to be forced to intellectually engage with the material, then his/her level of involvement with *Marat/Sade* must not be continuously distracted in the ambiguity of their role as a viewer. But when the shots, coupled with the montage that organizes them, first lead one to believe that the viewer is a prisoner, then an anonymous spectator in the prison, then perched on top of a non-existent step ladder, then an audience member with a view of the

<sup>15</sup> One could draw comparisons with this portrayal of Marat and Claude David's iconic portrait of Marat, which would imply that only Sade is the "real" character, with Marat being a mere imitation of a painting.

<sup>16</sup> Incidentally, the shot of the cudgel, held low and at the ready by a faceless guard, is actually a Brechtian social gesture of the first order - it demonstrates the mechanism of power that puts down talk of liberty in the midst of supposedly "liberated" times. Brook's film is, after all, not *all* Artaud and no Brecht.

bars at the front, then an audience member with an almost totally obstructed view, one has been granted unnecessary freedom from the effectiveness of Brook's brilliant staging. We participate in the action while standing by and watching it. We become Sade, and Artaud has won even while Marat delivers his most passionate arguments. This is not to say that this omniscience is even avant-garde; on the contrary, Brook has placed the viewer in a conventional, comfortable position as an all-seeing voyeur who is occasionally stared at - the Hollywood position. One cannot question the very apparatus of a production if one is allowed to feel or experience too much "freedom" in the confines of that apparatus. Brook's film certainly questions the apparatus of the theater, but he confirms the superiority of the movie camera over it.

In addition, the final sequence of the film with its devolution into violence and atrocity can only be made as shocking as it is with Brook's jerky hand-held shots and rapid cutting. It is actually palpable in the editing during the march that something terrible will happen, the shot length shortening all the while, but the suspense is nevertheless prolonged until the guards move in on the prisoners to suppress them. The close-ups and gradual fear and abandon developing on the faces of the various characters represent remarkable direction, and the black face of Kokol approaching the camera through the bars is highly threatening. Thereafter, Roux is bowled over and the scene devolves into chaos on account of the camera swerving all over the place, camera operator Jim Day injecting an extreme amount of disorientation and panic to add on top of the continuous female screams and loud crashing noises made by the lunatics. Sade's face is cut in at one point from the side profile, his laughter inaudible, but his pleasure at the sheer abandon of the situation quite evident. The scene as is certainly does not exist

in Weiss' script, but it is the film's very denial of any safe ground to which to go, save turning away or turning off the film, that makes the merger with audience and experience complete. Brook goes so far as to conjure up his silhouetted audience as a character itself within these final few shots. The audience members, mostly males wearing non-descript formal clothing, clamor at the bars to try and stop the carnage. The last shot of the film consists of their standing backsides facing toward the madness on-stage, the din slowly fading away in the background. Not only is the viewer then the omniscient being that can stand on both sides of the bars, but can also see the audience that they were momentarily a part of suddenly as a character taking some kind of futile agency. On a human psychological scale given the standards of the 1960s, Brook has authored an extraordinarily appalling spectacle at the end. But the actor playing Marat, that idealist and revolutionary social activist all rolled into one man, continues to play his role in Sade's production as a corpse. Sade decided that Marat should die, but Brook decided that he should remain dead despite Weiss' revised script, and the strength of Brecht's argument should diminish.

#### **IV. A Brechtian/Artaudian Possibility**

Aesthetically, Brook chose a more surrealist, pseudo-conservative film-going experience for his viewers than Godard or Fassbinder might have done. In 1966 and 67, however, a statement could still be made by shocking the audience with cinematic displays of sex, violence and depravity.<sup>17</sup> Brook played into the Artaudian aesthetic because he believed at the time that the side he chose was effective, that people were

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<sup>17</sup> Film audiences today are now notoriously difficult to shock. Michael Haneke's *Caché* (2005) is perhaps the only politically inclined film of last year that also contained a shot jarring enough to cause a whole jaded audience to audibly gasp in horror, whereas utter bloodbaths such as *Hostel* (2005) and *Wolf Creek* (2005) are laughed off by our time's many Veterans of Gore.

better shocked than reasoned with. And given the expectations of the theater at the time, the audience had to experience a complete merger with the stage action in order to become affected by it. Indeed, Brook's essay entitled "Immediate Theatre" written at the time attests that "there is only a practical difference between actor and audience, not a fundamental one," a statement which for all intents and purposes could have come from Artaud's writing on the theater in the 1930s.<sup>18</sup> Yet also in the 1960s, as political questions about spectacle and the use of cinema as illusionist voyeurism arose, Brook might have chosen to pay more than mere lip service to the Brecht-inspired aesthetics of the avant-garde New German or French New Wave Cinema. *Marat/Sade* afforded an opportunity to not only capture the Brecht/Artaud dialectic aurally with words and visually on-stage with sets and costumes but also cinematically for generations.

The dialectic aspect of *Marat/Sade* is still feasibly captured on film, though just like with the employment of Marat's fanatic idealism as a paradigm for political action, one must tread cautiously between the ideals of epic theatrical and surrealist/nihilist cinema. The problem inherent in Brechtian filmmaking is preserving the societal play of ideas without boring or confusing the audience. The problem inherent in Artaudian filmmaking is the heated battle of symbols in front of the camera overtaking any kind of measured discourse on society and property relations hidden behind it. The balance struck must mean that, on the one hand, certain barriers have to be erected between the film and viewer while, on the other hand, these barriers must be eliminated in specific circumstances. It would have benefited Brook's production, for example, if he had taken a page or two from his own theatrical theory, in which he advocates decentralizing action and letting the audience witness multiple events and actions on-stage at once. In

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<sup>18</sup> Brook, pg. 134. Also see Artaud's *The Theater and its Double*.

*Marat/Sade*, racking focus and slow tracking are his means of opening up the space for multiple actions to happen before the camera. Otherwise, his default point of focus is the standard theatrical close-up of the actors' faces. Later directors like Peter Greenaway have proven that one can put events in the foreground *and* the background of a shot if one composes it carefully and lets the camera run without cutting. Of course, Greenaway began his work a decade or two later, but no technique that he utilizes in his cinematography was unavailable to Brook at the time. Putting more tableaux shots into the production allows a viewer's eyes to roam, dignifying his/her intelligence as a spectator and simultaneously opening up the cinematic space for social gestes or even shocking acts of horror to occur.<sup>19</sup> The jerky camera at the end could have been replaced by a tableaux or one long, smooth tracking movement, so that the viewer is not deluded that he/she is there, but is instead conscious of their voyeuristic position and still forced to choose between turning away from the carnage or not. In addition, had Marat and Sade been simply given equality in terms of framing their expressions and their reactions - the film's two protagonists being recognized by the camera as being such - their characters' arguments also might have been conferred equal status despite Sade's direction of the internal play.

Moreover, Brook might have taken a more avant-garde approach with his *mise-en-scène* and physically obstructed the camera with the bars. The distancing between the viewer and the stage action would have been made abundantly clear, but on top of that a kind of cruel, film-visual limitation would be thus inflicted on the audience. This would have made the film perhaps less accessible to a general viewing public, yet would

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<sup>19</sup> As far as the latter is concerned, see Pier Paolo Pasolini's *Salo* (1975) for some wonderful examples of tableaux style Artaudian violent spectacle. The only close-ups in the film, in fact, come from a point in the film where Pasolini is accusing the viewer of being a voyeur along with the perpetrators.



have distinguished the viewer's place within *both* aesthetic debates: one would know where one is positioned in relation to the action on-screen/on-stage and has the whole film's duration to grapple with why. In addition, having the insane inmates enacting their characters to a minimal degree, downplaying their insanity to the point of mere social gestures, might also call into question the socially constructed nature of their madness. However, I personally assert that such an overt tactic, as it was implemented in the GDR with the substitution of political prisoners, would exclude the Artaudian aesthetic to an extremely limiting degree. The grotesquerie of Weiss' original work revolves around the inmates' status as "sleepwalkers," a sort of irrational lumbering horde that still has some intuitive knowledge of the world's relations.

The comparative madness of Marat and Sade, with regard to philosophy and historical action constitutes the most pivotal point of question and dispute within Weiss' play. Though the work contains multiple imbedded levels of historicity, the "realistic" historical experiences of Marat in Paris or Sade in Charenton are not necessarily conveyed. Instead, the historical backdrops coupled with the various surreal elements of both frameworks (i.e., the lack of narrative cohesion within Sade's play and the nightmarish "reality" of the lunatics in Weiss') boil away the substance of these two characters to leave nothing but two madnesses, two opposing worldviews and two sets of historical actions to back it up. One resembles Artaud as he was in life: a nihilist who embraces the full extremity of the world's cruelty in his ideals and art but who has not personally inflicted such cruelties on anyone. The other resembles Brecht, albeit with a hefty dose of Lenin: an Enlightenment idealist whose embrace of the ideals and aesthetics of revolution cause him to justify and inflict unimaginable cruelties on their

behalf. The stage for an intellectual conflict is irrevocably established. Yet the dialectic between the freethinking loafer and closed-minded shaper of history embodies Artaud in its basic form, a play whose author is a character acted out by the insane, and in Weiss' personal absolute belief in each of the total, extreme positions put forth by his work. Thus Weiss has put his own clashing ideals on trial with no victor, regarding which Brook has some compelling insight:

Surely what's interesting is that there are two completely distinct Peter Weisses. There is a man who at a moment of his life was so wracked with the absolute impossibility of making sense of his own contradictions that he lived through an immense transformation, with everything Sade means. He emerged from his sadistic period to face a world which appalled him; so he swung into politics. Here, every argument he gave even momentary belief to dissolved, and he came back to the Sade-like view that it is all different forms of subjective limitation - there is no way out. Weiss couldn't resolve the contradiction, and in that state of mind he wrote a play in which everything expressed is just like taking his head and opening it and giving it to you on a plate.<sup>20</sup>

The passionate creation of an artist bewildered by his position in the world cannot therefore by definition be fully Brechtian, as his spectacle is not necessarily intended for merely educational purposes. So while the historical framing of the action might alienate the audience, the multiple extreme perspectives and method of displaying the conflict reaches beyond Brecht in many respects. One ought to be both intellectually and emotionally engaged, though in neither way conventionally so. Brook's film of *Marat/Sade* does invite both levels of engagement, but only with the stage production because the film document thereof otherwise contains biased elements toward the emotional.

Since Weiss' play is one without a coherent, cogent advocacy for action or inaction with regard to political and aesthetic problems, the only dialogue in the play of interest becomes that between the actors and the audience. During the roundtable after

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<sup>20</sup> "Marat/Sade Forum." pg. 222.

the performance at Tulane in 1966, the critics Norman Podhoretz and Leslie Fiedler vehemently disagreed with one another about who "won" the debate. Podhoretz matter-of-factly asserted "if anyone wins the debate, it's Marat." Fiedler retorted: "Sade has to win because he wrote Marat's lines."<sup>21</sup> It is in this sense that Brook "chose" the winner of Weiss' play: not because he disbelieved in an equal dialectic, but that he as an individual had the film made in a certain style. For the 1960s, Brook was considered a highly left-leaning filmmaker and theater director, especially with the widespread success of *Marat/Sade* as a production. Thus at the time he might have been considered a follower of Marat, whereas from the critical lens of the present, his film is certainly the work of a Sadist. Nevertheless, struggling to achieve a balanced aesthetic between a philosophy of theater that advocates constructing boundaries between the audience and the actors and another that seeks to dissolve such boundaries would be a directorial challenge, indeed. Both Artaud and Brecht, as well as Brook and Weiss, sought the same extreme result: mass social and psychological change within the theater-going community. The question still remains open today, however, of how the majority of people who attend plot-expository Hollywood films like *Mission Impossible 3* (2006) and/or *The DaVinci Code* (2006) (i.e., Weiss' lunatics) and largely ignore the theater will be affected by old avant-garde cinema such as Brook's whatsoever.

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* pg. 224.

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